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SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 10th MEETING

Chairman: Mr. HADID (Algeria)

Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions: Mr. MSELLE

CONTENTS

AGENDA ITEM 121: REVIEW OF THE EFFICIENCY OF THE ADMINISTRATIVE AND FINANCIAL FUNCTIONING OF THE UNITED NATIONS (continued)

ORGANIZATION OF WORK

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The meeting was called to order at 10.20 a.m.

AGENDA ITEM 121: REVIEW OF THE EFFICIENCY OF THE ADMINISTRATIVE AND FINANCIAL FUNCTIONING OF THE UNITED NATIONS (continued) (A/48/277, A/48/281, A/48/428, A/48/452 and A/48/460; E/AC.51/1993/L.6/Add.1, Add.2, Add.30 and Add.31)

1. Mr. TAKASU (Deputy to the Under-Secretary-General for Administration and Management and Controller), introducing documents A/48/277, A/48/281, A/48/428, A/48/452 and A/48/460, said that the report of the Secretary-General on a possible new approach to programme planning (A/48/277) had been prepared in response to General Assembly resolution 47/214 and was based on the conclusions of the technical seminar convened under that resolution in April 1993. The shortcomings in the current programme planning system identified by the participants in the seminar were listed in paragraph 8 of the report. To summarize them briefly, the medium-term plan did not fulfil its intended functions. The report (A/48/277) had already been reviewed by the Committee for Programme and Coordination (CPC), which had recommended replacing the medium-term plan with a composite document containing a perspective, which would be a concise, forward-looking policy document, and a programme framework, which would list only major programmes, programmes and subprogrammes and provide guidelines against which the preparation and implementation of the programme budget would be assessed (E/AC.51/1993/L.6/Add.30). CPC had recommended that a prototype of the composite document should be presented to the General Assembly at its forty-ninth session through CPC and the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions (ACABQ) in order to facilitate a final decision on the format. Once the General Assembly had approved the new format, a new planning system would be in place. In order to have the prototype ready for CPC when it met in early 1994, the Secretariat would have to devote most of its efforts in the coming months to that task. If, at the same time, it was asked to prepare revisions to the current medium-term plan for submission to the General Assembly at its forty-ninth session, its work on the prototype might be delayed. In deciding whether to recommend such amendments, the Committee should bear in mind that the smooth implementation of any new activities that had received specific legislative mandates from the intergovernmental bodies, including the General Assembly, would not be hampered by the non-submission of revisions to the current plan.

2. The report of the Secretary-General in document A/48/281 had been prepared in response to the request by the General Assembly in resolution 46/189 that the Secretary-General should submit to it at its forty-eighth session a report on the review of the procedures for the provision of statements of programme budget implications and for the use and operation of the contingency fund. The report also addressed the question of the methodology for estimates for preventive diplomacy and peacemaking in future budget outlines and programme budgets. Since ACABQ had expressed the opinion that preventive diplomacy and peacemaking activities were, by their very nature, unpredictable (A/48/281, para. 32) and since the General Assembly had endorsed that opinion at its forty-seventh session, the Secretary-General had not included any estimates for programme budget implications or revised estimates relating to the maintenance of

(Mr. Takasu)

international peace and security in the proposed programme budget for the biennium 1994-1995. However, he intended to continue to review the matter with an eye to enhancing the transparency of the budgetary process and reducing add-ons to the original budget proposals. In that connection, the views of Member States would be appreciated.

3. The report on the accountability and responsibility of programme managers in the United Nations (A/48/452), which had been submitted in response to General Assembly resolution 47/214, focused mainly on the existing system of internal and external controls. He wished to assure the Committee that the Secretary-General attached the utmost importance to transparency, cooperation and accountability in the exercise of management responsibilities within the Organization. The Secretary-General had noted the recommendation of CPC that the system should be amended to provide, as a minimum, unmistakable allocation of responsibilities among staff members, particularly programme managers, including clear supervisory responsibilities and mechanisms for performance assessment and remedial action (E/AC.51/1993/L.6/Add.31, para. 6). Once the General Assembly had approved that recommendation, the Secretary-General would submit a report to the General Assembly at its forty-ninth session, in the light of the CPC target that changes should be implemented by 1 January 1995.

4. With regard to the report on the restructuring and efficiency of the Secretariat (A/48/428), he said that the reforms implemented to date were designed to eliminate duplication and to give priority to providing substantive support for central intergovernmental bodies. In the political sector, the new structures were built around the Organization's responsibilities in the areas of preventive diplomacy, peace-keeping, peacemaking and peace-building. In the development field, the restructuring measures had been far-reaching and were rooted in a basic concept of those functions that were best performed at Headquarters and those that were best undertaken by other global and regional entities within the Organization. In the area of management, the aim had been to introduce an integrated approach to all interrelated functions. For reform to go forward effectively, it was necessary to improve communications among all parties and at all levels. The objectives and parameters must be clear if they were to engage the support of Member States and secure the commitment of the staff. It was also necessary to accelerate the pace of intergovernmental reform, because the reform agenda could not be carried out by the Secretariat alone. Governments must do their part, too. Restructuring was also an attempt to correct the imbalance between what was expected from the Organization and the resources available to translate such responsibilities into reality.

5. The report of the Independent Advisory Group on United Nations Financing (A/48/460) was timely and important. Unless measures were taken to ensure a secure financial basis for the United Nations, there would be no fundamental improvement in its financial situation. The many valuable recommendations contained in the report merited careful review by the General Assembly. The Secretary-General's detailed comments on them should be available shortly.

6. Mr. DAMICO (Brazil), referring to the new format of the medium-term plan, cautioned against rushing to a decision on the matter. The Committee for Programme and Coordination was to be commended for its approach, which gave the Fifth Committee enough time to consider its recommendations.

7. In the view of his delegation, not all of the criticisms directed against the results and the conceptual aspects of the current system were valid. Discussion of the medium-term plan gave Member States an opportunity to participate in the planning process and helped to enhance the democratic character of the Organization and the effectiveness of the Secretariat. Moreover, the process of the discussion of the plan reduced the time required for the discussion of the budget. As CPC stated in its draft report on the second part of its thirty-third session (E/AC.51/1993/L.6/Add.30, para. 11), there was a need for a programmatic planning tool beyond the biennial programme budget. However, as noted in the Secretary-General's report on the subject (para. 8 (a)), the medium-term plan was an aggregation of sectoral views rather than a comprehensive policy document. Furthermore, the time and effort devoted to planning was not commensurate with the time and effort devoted to implementation and evaluation.

8. He was pleased to note that the basic proposals worked out during the technical seminar in April had been retained by CPC. The proposed perspective document, which revived the idea of a forward-looking policy document, should be the final product of intense discussions between the Secretariat and Member States and among the Member States themselves. The programme framework would considerably reduce the narrative part of the medium-term plan while detailing the mandates and objectives of each programme; legislative mandates would continue to be reconciled and consolidated at the level of the programme of work. In addition, the programme framework would be reviewed in the off-budget year so as to coincide with the preparation of the budget outline. In that connection, his delegation endorsed the recommendation of CPC that the present two-year programme budget cycle should be continued (E/AC.51/1993/L.6/Add.30, para. 12). He hoped that the Secretariat would be able to present the prototype of the new format to the General Assembly at its forty-ninth session so that a decision on any changes could be taken at that time.

9. Mr. CLAVIJO (Colombia) endorsed the conclusions of CPC with respect to the Secretary-General's reports on the accountability and responsibility of programme managers, the restructuring of the Secretariat and the new format for the medium-term plan. He reiterated the concern of CPC regarding the inadequacy of the report on accountability, which failed to address the issues. He drew attention to the recommendation in paragraph 8 of the relevant part of the draft report of CPC (E/AC.51/1993/L.6/Add.31), which he hoped the Secretary-General would follow up promptly, and to the recommendation in paragraph 7 of that document, that the new system should be implemented as soon as possible, but no later than 1 January 1995.

10. On the subject of restructuring, he pointed out that CPC had called for a new report, since in resolution 47/212 the General Assembly had requested an analytical report and the one submitted was more descriptive than analytical (E/AC.51/1993/L.6/Add.1). With regard to the new format for the medium-term plan, his delegation supported the conclusions of CPC (E/AC.51/1993/L.6/Add.30).

(Mr. Clavijo, Colombia)

It was clearly necessary to have a document that would serve as a more effective guide for the discussion of the programme budget, and the composite document recommended would avoid the current duplications in the discussions of the medium-term plan and the budget.

11. The Committee was faced with the question of whether or not the medium-term plan for the current period should be revised. If the Committee decided in favour of revision, it should give the Secretariat very clear instructions in order to avoid duplicating the discussion on the budget. It might be best to limit the revisions to programmes and perhaps even to the list of programmes. His delegation was flexible with regard to the approach taken, but it was important to avoid repeating past mistakes. As to the urgency of preparing the prototype format, he thought that the Secretariat would have enough time to prepare a very simple model by the forty-ninth session of the General Assembly.

ORGANIZATION OF WORK

12. The CHAIRMAN said that he had received a communication from the President of the Coordinating Committee for Independent Staff Unions and Associations of the United Nations system requesting permission to present a document and make an oral presentation to the Fifth Committee in connection with agenda item 128. He had also received a communication from the President of the Federation of International Civil Servants' Associations requesting permission to make an oral presentation in connection with the same agenda item. If he heard no objection, he would take it that the Committee wished to approve those requests.

13. It was so decided.

The meeting rose at 11.05 a.m.